

Meeting of the Cross Party Group for Looked After Children

Tuesday 12^h March 2019

12.30–1.30

AMs present:

David Melding AM – Chairperson (DM)

In attendance:

Janet Finch Saunders AM

Councillor Graham Hinchey – Cardiff Council (GH)

Deborah Jones – CEO, Voices From Care Cymru (DJ)

Heidi Keiser – NSPCC

Councillor Ash Lister – Cardiff Council

Reverend Philip Manghan - Catholic Education Service

Sean O’Neil – Children in Wales (SON)

Iwan Williams – Social Care Wales

Menna Thomas – Barnardos Cymru

Ann Bell – Adoption UK (AB)

Paula Foley – Jenny Rathbone AM Support Staff

Sian Thomas – National Assembly Research Service

Elizabeth Flowers – Children’s Commissioner for Wales Staff

Sharon Lovell – NYAS Cymru (SL)

Siôn Jones – Helen Mary Jones AM Support Staff

Catriona Williams – Chief Executive, Children in Wales

Hannah Trezise – MBSS Janet Finch Saunders

Tim Crahart – Business Support Manager, Voices From Care Cymru – (minute taker) (TC)

Apologies received from:

Maria Boffey – Head of Operations, The Fostering Network Wales

Dan Willis – Stepping Stones

Tom Davies – Children’s Society

Malcolm Williams – Social Care Wales

Lucy Treby – Social Care Wales

1. Welcome and introduction from the Chair

DM welcomed the group

Ann Bell was welcomed as a new member of the group.

2. Minutes

MT offered a correction to the minutes. Elaine Speyer to be changed from NSPCC to Barnardos.

Minutes of the last meeting were agreed by those present.

There were no matters arising.

3. Public Accounts Committee

DM reported that the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) has been published.

Hardcopies are available or it can be accessed online at

www.assembly.wales/seneddPAC. The WG responded on the 17th January. Twelve recommendations were made and all but one were accepted. This report is the initial phase of the work of PAC. The PAC have replied to the Government asking for clarity on some of their responses.

Whilst the PAC and the report focusses on value for money, it also looks at outcomes and gathers evidence from young people.

DM stated that the report and the work of the PAC brings a lot of political pressure and attention to the looked after system. He added that corporate parenting has to break out of Children's Services and into the political realm. Local Councillors, Assembly Members and the First Minister have to play their part.

DM encouraged the group to read the report.

4. Ministerial Advisory Group (MAG)

DM said that the Assembly is now half way through its term and that the MAG will be working throughout this period. So far the group has focussed on extending its knowledge base, gathering data, etc. but is now asking the question 'What are we going to do with this information?'

He added that there are now over 6,000 young people in care in Wales. The numbers of children and young people coming into care is falling and edge of care services are getting better. However, the numbers are not consistent across all local authorities.

DM said that the new First Minister and Deputy Minister know the sector well. This will provide new focus and energy for the group. Issues are likely to come to the fore in the next six months and guidance on corporate parenting is likely to be developed. MAG will also work on the recommendations from the PAC report.

- Educational attainment: this is a key area and is a good indicator of outcomes for care experienced children. If they have good attachment, they are more likely to do well.

- Number of secure placements: this is a concern for the Government. Placements are mixed between welfare and criminal justice. Anecdotally, there is a feeling that the number of placements available are the number that get filled. MAG will work with Local Authorities to look at differences across areas.
- Managing the system of care: How do Local Authorities work with the Welsh Government to manage the care system.

5. Adoption and the care experienced community

Ann Bell from Adoption UK Wales delivered a presentation on ACEs.

She started by explaining that Wales is the only country to have a National Adoption Service. We know very little about the educational attainment of adopted children. In England, parents can draw down money for adopted children in schools.

AB went on to say that when children are adopted it doesn't rewrite their history. Trauma is a result of ACEs. Cardiff University have undertaken research. 47% of adopted children have 4+ ACEs. ACEs work is highlighting developmental disorders.

The government has put £2.3 million into adoption services.

Adoption UK is currently running the Equal Chance campaign. The campaign recognises that not all children have an equal start in life but all children deserve an equal chance at school.

AB talked about Therapeutic Education Support Services in Adoption (TESSA) project. It found that a third of adopted children required no educational support, one third required some support and a further third needed intensive support.

DM thanked AB for the presentation and said that it was informative and helpful. He raised the issue of Foetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS) and how the foetus can be affected by very low levels of alcohol. He said that the Scottish AMs were working with FAS hubs and they had identified that 70% of adopted children have FAS.

DJ asked AB whether adopted children would identify as being care experienced. AB said that this would depend upon how old they were when they were adopted and how their parents talk about their adoption.

DJ asked whether there was a danger in labelling children with ACEs, as many care experienced young people have built up a level of resilience in spite of their backgrounds. AB said that being aware of ACEs can help children and young people understand their behaviour better and that they are not just being bad.

AB was asked about TESSA. She answered that it primarily supports parents and the family but it often finds that support is also needed in school.

GH stated that there is a push for more funding for edge of care and adoption services and asked what better structures could exist.

AB felt that she wouldn't want NAS to change much as it works relatively well. She added that funding should be more about support than structure.

SL said that care experience young people have access to statutory advocacy services but adopted children and young people don't have the same entitlement.

AB replied that they are aware of this with Adoption UK.

6. Any other business

DM said that he would appreciate input into how the group was run and asked what topics the group could cover.

The following topics were then identified:

- Barriers to accessing services for out of county placements i.e. CAHMS
- Guidance around Corporate Parenting; how the group can influence guidance
- Additional learning needs and care experience.
- Independent visitors; an update on practice as it appears inconsistent
- Right Bill to people of all ages
- Collaboration with other cross party groups
- Mind Over Matter; a watching brief
- Funding; Welsh Government holding Local Authorities to account
- Edge of care; what does this look like
- ACEs agenda; creating balance between stigmatisation and celebration

7. Date of next meeting.

12.30 on the 4th June 2019 in Conference Room B, ground floor, Ty Hywel.